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# FOREIGN SERVICE DESPATCH

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## Summary

The Government's four-year highway construction program announced by the official press this week was considerably larger than the ten-year $50,000,000 program which the International Bank Mission recommended in 1951 but there was no explanation as to how it would be financed. In an apparent effort to assimilate rapidly the large number of laborers being discharged by the National Farms, President ARBENZ signed a resolution which provided that 87 Government-owned and operated farms should be turned over to the National Agrarian Department by April 28 for distribution to the workers.

## Highways

The official Diario de Centro América announced this week that highway construction to be undertaken under the Government's $20,000,000 public work program announced last November would involve completion in four years of ten trunk and four feeder highways with a total of 750 miles of paved road. The principal highways would be the Atlantic; the Pan American; the Pacific Coast Highway from the Mexican border to Chiquimulilla; and roads from Huehuetenango east to Lake Izabal, from Totonicapán to the Pacific Coast port of Champerico, and from Guatemala City to Tucurú in the Department of Alta Verapaz. The press stated that of the 750 miles of proposed new roads, 140 miles of the Atlantic Highway and 95 miles in the Pacific slope area were already under construction.

The proposed network of new roads will be considerably larger and more expensive than the $50,000,000 ten-year program suggested in 1951 by the International Bank

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Mission. In general, however, it follows the Bank's recommendations. As regards financing, only $4,000,000 of the $20,000,000 bond issue for the entire public works program will be available for the Government's highway program unless plans have been changed, since about $16,000,000 has been earmarked for other projects (WEEKAS Nos. 8, 11 and 12).

Colonel Carlos ALDANA Sandoval, Minister of Communications, recently announced that the Atlantic Highway had been broken through to Puerto Barrios and that a jeep could travel over the entire route. Colonel Aldana said that although the work had been somewhat delayed because of climatic conditions, especially rain, the 100-day intensive work plan which began on January 1 (WEEKA No. 47) had proved its worth and similar plans would be used on other sections of the road.

Agrarian Reform

In an attempt to expedite the transfer of the Government-owned and operated farms to the National Agrarian Department (DAN) and their distribution to farm workers, President Arbenz recently signed a resolution which set up 15 new commissions to handle the legal details for winding up the Government's operation of 87 such farms and specified that their transfer to the DAN be effected by April 28. The press stated that 20,000 employees of the National Farms organization (FN) would have been released by that date and would be anxiously awaiting receipt of their individual parcels of land. If there were delay, the Government would have a serious problem on its hands.

As part of its program of giving technical and material aid to beneficiaries of the Agrarian Reform Law, the Ministry of Agriculture reported this week that it would soon distribute 325,000 rubber trees and 200,000 cacao plants to new landholders in areas suitable for cultivating those crops. Guatemalan farmers have shown an interest in rubber and technicians consider that a few acres of rubber trees properly worked represent a valuable supplement to a small farm.

Rudolf E. Schoenfeld

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